

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm the director of the Caine College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Phyllis Ziman Tobin, and we are privileged to welcome Mila Bachner, a survivor presently living in Passaic, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Mrs. Bachner, we'd like to welcome you. And there was something that you wanted to say at the outset, please.

Thank you. My name is Mila Bachner. I now live in Passiac, New Jersey. I am a survivor of the most unspeakable inhumanities ever inflicted on mankind. I volunteered to come forward and tell the story of my six years of suffering during the Nazi reign of terror. This task is not an easy one, but it is our duty as survivors to tell it to the world, so that they should learn the hard lesson of the Holocaust.

Would you tell us a little bit about your family and your background and the city you lived in before the war?

I was born in Chrzanow, Poland. It was a beautiful little town with about 18,000-- population of about 18,000. 8,000 were Jews. I lived there with my parents, my three brothers, and my three sisters. It was a--

Yes.

I would like to show them to you, if I may. These are my parents Anne and Leo Zagorski, my sister Malka, my brother Chaim my sister Mesia, my brother Nachmele, my brother Maury, and myself, Mila.

Tell us about them.

Our life in-- our life at home-- well, or should I say we led a rather mundane life. But it was a happy and respectful life. My older sister Malkele married a man of my parent's choice. I feel to the very day that perhaps she would have been alive had she not gotten married. But this is what my parents wanted, and this is what she did.

Was your home a religious home?

Yes. It was a beautiful religious home. My mom wore a wig. My dad did not have a beard or payos, but he was a very fine, devout Jewish man. And so were we, six children, all went to Beis Yaakov all had a Hebrew education. We went to public school, and it was just beautiful.

What was your father's occupation?

There were four brothers in Chrzanow. Four brothers, and they were all involved in their business. It dealt with cattle and horses, like they were selling and buying. I can't remember very much, but this is what I do remember.

Yeah.

My father made a nice living. We did not have the luxuries of modern America, but we had other luxuries at home. We had the love and the respect for one another.

And about-- and what year were you born? What year were you born?

I was born on March 15, 1927.

1927.

Yes.

And you were the youngest, the oldest? What is your--

I was the middle. We were six children, three boys and three girls. I was the middle, in the middle of the girls.

Who was the oldest child? A boy or girl?

Malkele.

The one who got married?

The one who got married, yes.

I see.

Then came my sister Mesiele. Then came my brother Nachmele. [Personal name] was the oldest of the boys, and my brother [Personal name] was the middle boy, the one who survived.

OK. Were there any other people living with you in your home?

Not at that time.

Did you know your grandparents? Did you know your--

Oh, yes. We had grandparents in my hometown, my grandmother and one grandfather. One grandfather died when he was stricken by lightning.

What were some early memories of your family that you have? Things that are particularly treasured by you or that you remember very, very well?

Well, there is no particular moment. Every moment that I was with my family, I treasured.

Any holidays that stood out?

We had-- well, we observed every holiday in the book. It's-- even Purim was a big holiday. Shavuot and Sukkot and Pesach, of course, was a very, very big thing. I have visions of my father sitting in his kittel at the Seder, and the six children surrounding the table and my mom serving the fish. It's like I relive very often in my dreams and our life at home.

What was your life in that community like with those of you who were not Jews? What was the life in the entire town like?

Well, we had very often antisemitic remarks. I've heard them from one of my neighbors. His name was Toshek a young boy. But we would hear words like [NON-ENGLISH] which means to Palestine with you Jews. And I was only a young child. But I remember saying to him, you just give me Palestine, and I will go fast. And we often heard on Pesach that we used the blood-- we would slaughter of a Jew-- a non-Jewish child and put the blood into the matzos, which is a very old thing, but we heard it.

Blood libel.

Yeah. That we use their blood, that we killed Jesus, and that's why we are not loved. And I knew that this is not true, because I learned in Beis Yaakov And I learned the Bible, and I knew that these were just false accusations only to build up the hatred even more in their hearts toward us.

So even before the Germans came--

Even before the Germans came, we heard it.

--there was--

Yes.

Yeah.

Yes, we did.

Were you and your family ever personally threatened or personally attacked in any way?

My father told us stories, and his-- during his married life that he was very-- many times attacked by Polacks who literally wanted to kill him. But he was a strong guy. My dad was a very strong man. And he pulled them off. There were four brothers. And the people were a little scared of them. But this was their weapon. They were very husky, very-- very Superman-like.

And this was only because they were Jewish?

Only because they were Jewish. No other reason than that. And with many, we got along well. It's like in any other country, including America.

So there was nothing that went on in your town that was in any way out of the ordinary for those times prior to?

No, just, I remember this one incident when my grandfather Pinchas-- that was my mom's dad-- was attacked by a family [Personal name] at that time. We knew who did it because they were caught. Nothing was done to them. But I remember somebody came running to my mom and saying, Chanele, Chanele, your father is in danger. He was attacked by Polacks. And we ran down in our nightgowns to find him laying on the floor, and six bayonets were placed around him. He-- I saw him there. It's a very vivid picture before me. And we took those bayonets away. He became paralyzed. We carried him into bed, and he never came out. He died. He died of fear.

And when was this? Do you know? Can you give a year?

Oh, this must have been in 1936.

Ah. Do you remember--

1936.

Excuse me. Do you remember when you personally-- how old were you when you began to really know that there was danger?

You mean--

Personal danger. Things started happening, and you knew--

Well, I would say about July of 1939.

Two months before the war.

July 1939.

How did you know?

June and July.

How did you know?

Well, we started noticing the worried faces on our parents. And a child has a very good perception. And I used to ask my mommy, mama, what is the matter? And she would just look at us, and she would kiss us. And I said, mommy, are you feeling all right? And she said, I am fine. I'm fine.

But then the radios-- people were, like, glued to the radios. We did not own a radio, but our neighbors in the backyard would stand outside and listen to them. And then we heard voices in German, voices in Polish that Germany is invading Poland. This is when I realized what is happening. But we didn't have any idea to what extent, to what low they will stoop, that they will try to annihilate a whole nation of Jews. We did not know.

Can I ask you where your town or city was placed geographically in Poland? Was it central? Was it western, eastern?

We are in western Europe. It's Galicia. It's considered Austria.

Yeah.

My father worked for Austria.

So you were in the line of the German attack?

We were not very far from Berlin. In fact, our town used to conduct business with Berlin. Chrzanow, that's how close we were. And it was very hard for us to understand that they would do this to us, because of the close business relations that we had with them. We are, also, like 40 kilometers from Krakow.

Yes.

So it was very close. 18 kilometers from Auschwitz. It was Oswiecim. It was a beautiful Jewish town. My oldest sister, Malka, she won her beauty contest there. And it's ironic that her ashes were there, too.

She won a beauty contest there before the war.

In Oswiecim, yes, before the war. She was very beautiful. So, and then, we started to dig ditches in order to protect ourselves against the bombs that we already knew started flying overhead. Then, we decided to just pack our things and try to evacuate, to flee to safety. But there was no place to go. We were met by the German tanks and driven back. And while on our way coming back, we already saw dead bodies scattered all over. And it didn't take me long to realize that they were Jewish people, that the slaughter had already started.

Were these people who were being systematically killed, or were they people who died in the air raids or what?

They were shot.

They were shot.

You could see that they had holes in their bodies and their heads. And [INAUDIBLE]

How far out of Chrzanow had you gone before you turned back? Do you know?

We had been-- we had passed the Vistula. This is the river in Krakow that goes into the Baltic Ocean. We tried to go to Russia, but we just didn't make it.

So you came back to Chrzanow.

They forced us back to Chrzanow. And when we did come back to Chrzanow, a ghetto had already been formed. Because people from other towns and villages were already brought to our town. And we lived like four or five families in one apartment, which was very tight.

We did not have enough food, anymore. We did not have any water. We had no toilet facilities. They were very bad with so many people. And, of course, children needed attention, which they did not have, none whatsoever. And, of course, people took ill. So the Nazis made a rumor that we are carriers of disease and, therefore, had to be destroyed. And so the killing was very easy.

Was the composition of the ghetto made up only of Jews from Chrzanow, or was it-- were they brought in from other places?

They brought them in from other places, like Katowice and we were grouped together.

Were you back in your own home when you came back? Did you go back to your--

Yes, we came back to our own home, but it was no longer our own. It was occupied with other people. But we had to be together.

What happened to your father's business? Excuse me.

My father took very ill when they took my mother away. Oh, actually, your question was what happened to our business. It was, they took everything away from us. As soon as the Germans walked in to Poland, we were nothing anymore. We had nothing. We became nothing. They destroyed our shores. They destroyed our homes, our businesses. And at the end, they burned our lives.

What-- you say your mother was taken away. What was the order in the ghetto of, in your family, of who went?

The first thing that I remember at home was 1940 when my-- and this is a very, very vivid picture-- my brother [? Hamik ?] came home. He was very frightened. And he says, Mommy. He said, we hear there's going to be a roundup on young boys. And I think I'm going to slip to my friend, Barach [Personal name] They have a large attic, and we will try to hide there.

And we said goodbye. We kissed them. He hoped they will not find him. The following morning, he passes by our window. And I remember his leather jacket and his boots. He was a good looking boy. And he says, Mommy, they found me. He was under the Gestapo guards with their crazy dogs at their sides, ready to kill you on command. And this was the last that we saw of our brother.

Then, we got word that he died in a camp called Gross Masselwitz. Maybe you've heard of it. It was a very, very bad camp. Nobody made it out of there. This was our first child that was taken from us. Then my brother Maury, [? Moniek ?] we called him, he was called to do something by the Germans, and he did not show up. They were after him to kill him. So we hid him in the woods in Poland. We knew where he was.

One day, he tried to make it home. And we told him, [? Moniek, ?] [NON-ENGLISH], go back--

Go back.

--because they will kill you. And he did. Anyway, they did find him, after all. And he was sent away to a concentration camp. He was in Mauthausen. Mauthausen, Markstadt was the last camp that he was in. He's the one who survived.

I was given a job by the Germans to work on the [NON-ENGLISH] which means we got our IDs with a German stamp on it that we are going to be safe. How long, we did not know. So I worked in Trzebinia. We used to make coats for the

German soldiers-- raincoats for the German soldiers in the front. OK.

And then in between, my sister Malkele-- beg your pardon. In between, they called a roundup of all the middle aged women. And our mommy was included. She was a beautiful lady-- very, very brilliant. She spoke fluent German, [INAUDIBLE]. She spoke Yiddish and Hebrew. Brilliant. And we tried to make her as pretty as possible, because she did look older than her age, because of the wig. It was not one of those wigs that you have today. Today, it was more of a religious nature.

And my sister-- and my little sister Mesiele was holding her left side, and I held onto my mommy's right hand, this-- you know, like this.

Yeah.

But it was in order. Mommy was in the middle, and I was holding on. And we marched down to the marketplace where they were supposed to assemble. All the ladies who looked a little bit not to their liking was selected, who is to live and-- they were our angels, our gods. You are going to live, and you are going to die.

So mine-- I'm standing there. We are shivering. We are crying. And this Gestapo comes over, and he takes off his [INAUDIBLE] He wore those black boots and those long green coats. I still see him before my eyes with that helmet-- a giant, ugly looking. I hate them. He takes off the gun-- the rifle, and with the tip of it, he-- you know, like, he-- [INAUDIBLE] you know, like with-- he rips off my mom's sheitel. And with it, he made a big gash in her head. And the blood covered her face immediately.

We became very hysterical, my sister and I. And we begged them not to hurt Mommy anymore. And we are holding on to her. Then, with those black gloves, he goes over, and he cuts me like this, cuts my sister this way. My sister was thrown in this direction. I was thrown in this direction. My mom was thrown on the pile of the other women. She was covered with blood. We couldn't even see her face anymore.

And us, he ordered to go home. But we didn't. We were both very hysterical. So he threatened to kill us. This is not what he wanted. Again, I was there with my sister. That would have been too humane to kill both of us together. So we, instead of going home, we hid behind a building, because we wanted to see what will happen with my mom and the rest of the people. So we followed them down to the train station.

You followed the transport.

We followed the people back from afar. We just followed, like-- we sneaked like a tiger when he already has his prey.

Darting through.

Right. And we saw how they are big -- there's this cattle train-- open cattle train, no weapons-- no, no doors. They were thrown in like animals. And I tell you that animals would be treated better.

Were these just women, or were they--

Just middle aged women.

Middle aged women.

Just women. And Mommy-- and then they took one of those heavy ropes, because there were so many people in this cattle wagon that they would have fallen out. So they-- the rope just held them together. And the train took off. And your destination was Auschwitz.

You knew that then already. How did you know?

Because from my hometown, it was only 18 kilometers from Auschwitz.

What did you know then about Auschwitz?

We already knew that they are burning people. We already knew about the crematoriums. We did.

My sister and I came home, and my dad already was deathly ill from the pain of watching us being so, so destroyed, one by one. His intestines turned. You know, like, we call it in Polish [POLISH]. I don't know what you call it in the American language. But his intestines turned inside where he was unable to walk. He was walking on hand and feet.

He was saved until Judenrein until they cleaned out the town of Jews. And then, it was on a Friday, I remember. And I said to my sister and to my little brothers, I go, Mesiele, Nachmele, I have to go to work. Because if I don't show up in this factory, they will come and get me. And they will slaughter all of us, which I would not have minded. I wanted to die with my family. Why am I here? Why should they have died? But it's not what we wanted. I did not want them to die. There's always hope.

So I went to work. And I said, I'll see you tonight. That was Friday morning. All of a sudden, there was a big commotion in the factory. The girls became very restless, you know. And we felt something is going to happen.

Did I tell you about Malkele, how she went to Auschwitz?

No.

I didn't tell you. She died before-- she went before I. Mom went first, then came my sister and her baby, another round up. This was before my own, another roundup for young women and their babies. They took-- they drove them down to the-- when I say drove, I don't mean drive them. They drove them like animals down to the big synagogue.

How much time had elapsed between your mother's [INAUDIBLE]

This was done at the same-- this was done very shortly after. They already worked very closely because Judenrein was-- they were already on the verge of cleaning out-- of annihilate all of us. So I would say Mommy went in 1942. I-- Mommy went in 1942. I went in 1942. And my sister maybe beginning of 19-- I went beginning of-- the end of nineteen two and my sister-- of '42-- and my sister went like two or three months after Mommy went. It was all done in the same year.

And then in 1943, it was already Judenrein in Chrzanow. I'll tell you how I know. So they were-- they came down to the great synagogue in Chrzanow. It was an Orthodox synagogue we had, where the men were downstairs and the ladies upstairs. And I was hiding in the office of Eric [Personal name] He died in Florida not too long ago, that man. He survived the war.

And my sister was upstairs with the baby, and I could communicate with her just from motions. The next-- and then, when I looked out, I saw the trucks are lining up along the sidewalk. And each truck had written on it, Auschwitz in very big letters. I knew what is waiting for them to arrive.

They didn't bother to hide or camouflage it in any way?

No, very open, very open. And the next morning, the women came down with their babies. And my sister had a big coach, a yellow carriage for the baby. And she couldn't manage to get into the car-- to the truck. So this Gestapo kicked her in the back, that she just flew in, and her baby fell out of her hand. And this is the way it happened. They filled up the trucks. They took off. That was the last I saw of my sister. Auschwitz was their destination.

Soon thereafter, it came me, when I worked in Trzebinia for the rubber factory to make coats for the German soldiers. And I didn't work very long there and it was [INAUDIBLE], the commotion started, the very big unrest. And when there was any unrest, they dealt so systematically with the people. When they saw any sign of unrest, they would

carefully remove the people that caused it. They would be shot with a silencer, inaudible to other people. And this is how they kept us in order.

We know that, because there were people behind the building that were laying dead, one on top of another. And they took away our ID cards. They called it the kennkarte you know. And we were marched down from Trzebinia to Chrzan³w to the railroad station.

My little sister and my little brother must have found out somehow that we are going to pass through, because they came. My father couldn't make it anymore to see me, because he was very ill. They came running after us, and my little brother, Nachmele, who is on my right here.

Yes.

Is this all right?

Yes.

Yes.

He came over, and he kissed me. And he says to me, Mila, [NON-ENGLISH] I became the mirror of the house. And these are the words that will be with me for as long as I shall live. My little sister cried, [? Masiele. ?] But I said to her, sweetheart, you have to be strong. Take care of Daddy. Take care of yourself. Take care of your brother. I knew this was only like-- I said something, but I knew in my heart that it can never be.

We were driven. They put us on trains. There were no cattle wagons. They were regular trains. My Zayde Pinchas lived-- had a house down where this station was, but he was there, of course. We boarded the trains, and we came to Sosnowitz. This was a dulag. We call it the Dulag in Polish. And the Germans called it a durchgangslager.

Transit camp.

A transit camp.

Were these trains passenger cars that you were in?

We were in a regular train, I recall. We had seats, this I recall.

Yeah.

And you see, Dr. Weinstein, us, they send to a slave labor camp. They still needed girls to work. And this was only girls, again. So they sent us here to a camp where we should work. The conditions that we lived under, I will get to it.

We got on those trains. We came into the Dulag in Sosnowitz. And, of course, again, surrounded by the Gestapo and Nazis and their trained dogs. Just to look at them, you know, you could get the shivers. They ordered us into this building, and there was Dr. Novak. Dr. Ludwig and Dr. Novak-- Novak was a Polack. Ludwig was a German.

They were our-- again, they were the ones to decide who was going to live and who was going to die. Selections-- Dr. Mengele did it in Auschwitz. They did it in Poland.

Speaking of Poland, Dr. Weinstein, I want you to know that six exterminating camps were made in Poland. Now, indications are that they were not our friends, OK? The Polacks, I mean. No other nation allowed it.

And the selection came. When I came forward, I complained. I'm not feeling well, that my throat hurts and blah, blah. I thought it will help me, you know, I thought it's going to help me. But Dr. Ludwig looks at me. And he says to me, [NON-ENGLISH] You are as strong as a horse. And I said to myself, what does he mean? But, you know, he put me to

the side where people are not going to die. Why? I saw others were frail and sicker looking. They were doomed to die.

So even though this was a work camp, it was still used for extermination purposes.

Dulag was not a camp. Dulag was the transit camp. There, we passed. From there, we were sent to camps.

I see.

And so the next-- I don't know how long we were in the Dulag-- not too long, maybe two or three days. They marched us down to the railroad station again. I don't know how long the ride took to Neusalz, maybe three days. I have no idea whatsoever, because we were not given any time. We didn't know when was night and when was day. We just-- we rode. We were not people. We just obeyed.

We arrived in Neusalz. And I know it's Neusalz, because, like I said, I speak very good German. And then, I spoke even better German. I'm not proud that I do, but a language is a language. My mother had her brothers living in Berlin. They were very wealthy, intelligent, beautiful people. So a country is a country. A language is a language.

And they opened up the doors, and we came out. And I see this big sign, [NON-ENGLISH] overhead. And under, beneath it is written-- one of the SS women-- we were surrounded by the SS women already from the camp. I forgot to mention that. They came out. The women were worse than the men. I want you to know.

They treated us like dirt, like vermin, what they really wanted to call us. And she said, [NON-ENGLISH] And I raised my hand. And she said to me, [NON-ENGLISH] So I read it, and the sign is-- it is not important that I live, as long as I do my duty.

[NON-ENGLISH] This was their thing. And so we knew already exactly what is awaiting us. The gates opened up. And by the gate, I saw girls that were like living zombies, skeletons. And I said to myself, dear god, is this what will become of me? But then again, I am part of them now.

What year was this?

This was in 1942. This was 19-- I think August of 1942. And we were in this camp for three years, close to three years. The conditions were like this. We had no hot water, and we didn't have much of cold water. But we had to keep clean, not to have a lice or a nit in your head. Or else you lose your hair or your life as a filthy Jew.

We didn't have enough food to live or enough to die. So it was starvation by hunger. These are the conditions. We lived in barracks. We tried to make our life happy. We were young. We sang songs, Jewish songs. For some reason, we knew when Yom Kippur was. We tried to fast on Yom Kippur. We knew when a Shabbos was. I used to sing [? z'miros ?] when I did my work on Friday, my night shifts in my-- when I worked in the factory, I used to sing [? z'miros ?] to my girlfriend, Fella Shapiro. She's in Baltimore.

And we continued our-- we talked about home, about the [INAUDIBLE] and the fish and the chickens and the geese that Mommy used to cook. We tried to tell ourselves that things will be good again, that we will meet our parents. It was this hope that kept us through, I suppose.

Then, in nineteen-forty-- about January of 1945, again, there's a big ado in camp, big commotion. And the [INAUDIBLE] our lagerfÄ¼hrer-- she was the lagerfÄ¼hrer-- the oldest of the camp, the Germans-- she was over all. She says, [SPEAKING GERMAN] This camp must be evacuated, because we are going to make a hospital for [SPEAKING GERMAN] for our German soldiers. So where do we go?

This was three years, about, you lived in this labor camp?

I was about three years in this labor camp. And the death march began in January sometime.

Mhm. Could you tell us something-- in the three years that you were in this labor camp, did you change much?

Did I change much? Well, when you ask me if I changed, may I ask what do you mean?

Did you-- in the three years that you were doing the same thing with the same people--

Well, I--

Was your life stable there? Was it--

We tried. We tried very hard to get along well with the girls, which was very important, because it's 900 girls, 800 girls. And each one looks at you differently. You know, I came to camp, for instance, in 1942, while they were already there maybe from 1940. They were starved. I looked good. They were jealous.

I used to take a lot of beatings from them. But as young as I was, I guess I was sensible enough to know that jealousy can do terrible things to people. So I took the beating. You know, I also used to do extra work in camp besides my factory work, which you could lose your arm if you weren't careful. I used to work in the [INAUDIBLE] which was-- we used to make cotton that went from stages, you know, until it was formed.

And the machine was tremendously long, you know. So if I would put in my hand with my thumb out, I would lose my hand. So you had to use a position where you stopped the spool on this part of your hand to try

So that it didn't touch your finger.

To try to touch the cotton if it ripped. It had to be to a T, because when the inspection came, and it was not going right, then forget it. You are dead. And I remember an incident when we needed knives. When the spools were filled, we needed knives to cut them in one shot. I did-- my knife was a little bit stale-- not stale.

Rusty.

Rusty. It was stale, too. It was all rusty. I beg your pardon. So I went to the meister, Meister [Personal name] and I said to him, Herr Meister, my knife is not sharp enough, and I cannot. So he said, I would like to test it. I said, please do. He said, give me your finger. He went, and he cut into my finger. And he said, that knife is sharp. My blood started gushing. He said, that knife is sharp enough. You go to your side-- to your [INAUDIBLE] and you do your work.

This is what we were. They tried to make us sub-human. They almost succeeded, but we did have blood running. Our bodies had blood, too. They took-- they could have taken our souls-- our lives, but they could not touch our souls. This remained, thank God.

And so this was our work. If we did anything wrong, they would shake our heads in the middle through to recognize who we are. It's unbelievable to humanly describe. It's impossible to humanly describe what we went through. OK?

Anyway, the death march began sometime in January. And we-- it was winter. We had no warm clothes. We had no food. We had no water. We had nothing. We were assembled, and we marched out of the gates to nowhere, literally. So we marched. We walked by day, and we walked by night, not knowing where we are going. Nobody to help, nobody to talk to.

Well, [INAUDIBLE] We were left to the mercy of God and sometimes to a German farmer who showed a little compassion. And he would let us sleep overnight in the stables.

You were not in this march. You were not directed to go any place. You were just let out of the camp.

Just-- oh, we walked on the guard. We were not alone. We were under the SS guard constantly. To let us loose, we were barbarians. We could kill the Germans. Don't you know that we were barbarians? I'll tell you what they did. And that's

why we couldn't go into anybody to steal any food, because we would be shot on sight.

So as we walked, our hands-- people would-- people's hands would freeze. Their feet would freeze. They could no longer walk. So they were shot or left behind to die. And if we tried to help, they would shoot us, too.

How were you able to make your way, let's say, to a farmer's house to get help?

We walked in villages. We walked through towns and through villages. And telegrams were going that barbarians are coming. That's why I said barbarians. We were sick kids who needed food. Our feet did not carry us any longer, but we were barbarians. This is the civilized nation of Germany, I want you to know. Only a nation like that could do this.

And I tell you, I slept in a stable twice with the pigs and the cows. I slept, like, with them, side by side. And I felt as safe as the pig itself. And many times, I envied them for being animals. At least they had the care. We didn't. We walked by-- until late March. We came to a city.

Oh, I didn't tell you about my little sister, my little brother, and my dad. I have to digress again and go back.

Please.

When I was taken to camp, my sister and my brother went home to Dad. The last transport that came to Neusalz was in 1943, beginning. And Ursula Blumenfeld-- she was a friend of mine that came from Katowice to Chrzanów into the ghetto, and we became very friendly. She was a girl my age. And she said-- she kissed me and says to me, Mila, I wanted to take your sister [? Mesiele ?] with me to camp. But she did not want to leave your father and her brother.

So she went to Auschwitz. She said she was so beautiful that she could have easily passed for a 15-year-old child, but she chose to go to death with her daddy and her brother. And I never saw them again. That was it.

We came to Flossenbürg. They had trucks for us prepared. We were left few. Out of the 800 girls, I think maybe 350 came out, you know, because they were-- and in the course of the march, we came through this town that was called Potsdam, a very large city. Maybe you've heard it [INAUDIBLE] someplace. And we see these young children lined up in a long line, and they had uniforms that said Hitler-Jugend.

As we marched, and we could hardly walk. We were like living zombies. They would throw rocks and bottles at us, hit us with clubs. By the time we passed through this line, we were all covered with blood. But we made it. There was no water to wash ourselves.

Flossenbürg came-- we came to Flossenbürg. They had trucks ready for us. And they put us on trucks-- two trucks, I think, or so. So 150 people or so went on a truck. I jumped the truck with the girl that is on the tape. And when you listen to her, you'll hear what she's saying.

Yes.

So we were free for one-- for a half a day and one night. Because I said to her, you know, I said, Gucha, we are going to try to get a little food and get rid of the lice that were already on us. We didn't take-- we didn't bathe in all-- in all these months or weeks, we did not have a little water to wash our bodies.

So we walked into this German family. And me, because I spoke of a very good German, she did not really know who I was. I said, I am volksdeutscher that the Russians came close, and I'm separated from Mom, that-- from my parents, that we are going to meet someplace. And to her, I said-- Gucha, I said, you try to get food, as much as you can and fill up your coats. We still had our clothes from home at that time.

So she opened up the hem inside, and she filled up the bottom of the coat with different foods. And we took baths. She allowed us to take a bath. She gave us clean underwear, you know. And in the morning, we sat down to eat breakfast. And she starts talking to us politics. And I look at my friend, Gucha, now is the time to go. A politician, I'm not. I didn't

know what to answer.

And we took off so quickly, but we saw-- this was Floss. Flossenbürg was divided Floss from the giant forest where the camp was. We saw this Jewish cemetery. And the [INAUDIBLE] were down on the floor, the golden [INAUDIBLE] You could see that it was good stuff. And we laid down on those graves, and we started crying and screaming so loud that the guard did not open up his seventh heaven, then I had second thoughts if there really is a God. Sometimes, I felt that he forsook us, because the Talmud teaches us, thou shalt not place a stone before a blind person-- a stumbling stone before a blind person. And God did that to us.

We started walking toward the camp. Because she said, Mila, what do we do now? I said, look, I don't want to die nowhere. I want whatever will happen should happen with all of us. They'll kill us someplace in the gutter. Nobody will ever know that there was such a name as Mila and Gucha.

So I said, fine. And we started toward the camp. We see this guy on a bicycle. And we asked them where is the camp Flossenbürg, and he said to me, who are you? And I told him that we are two girls who fell off the trucks that were overcrowded, and that we want to go to camp.

We ate already our food. We had a bowl [INAUDIBLE] to capacity. And when we came to camp, this giant Gestapo with this Czech woman-- she was a doctor-- and a son. They were bad, the Czechs. They were like Nazis. They were collaborators, you know. They made us undress to take showers. They ripped out-- and I was so young. I was shy. And I just didn't want them to.

I was already clean. I took a bath, anyway. So she ripped my clothes off with him together. And on this neck of mine, I have that little bag with those pictures-- not those, the others. These are already made into a composite-- from my family that I managed to take from home and save them.

I don't know. I was-- I must have been a smart little girl to at least know that much to take pictures. Who would have thought of that, you know? And she's-- they see this on me, and this Gestapo says to me [NON-ENGLISH]

He says to-- these are pictures of my parents and my brothers and sisters. And he said-- and they said to me, you will not need those anymore. And I just said, as long as [NON-ENGLISH] As long as I will live, these pictures are going to stay with me. And he started pulling at my neck and beating me, that I felt wet. I felt that the blood is coming out of my neck from that rope that he-- it was a heavy rope from Poland, you know, and it cut into my neck.

He beat me to unconsciousness. But you know what? I found myself in the barracks. I was covered with blood, and I covered everybody else with blood, too. That's how severely I was beaten. But when I clutched my neck, I felt that sack on my -- I felt that bag. And I said, God, a miracle. I have my pictures. And I opened it up, and I take it out. And I started crying. It was worth everything. I have my pictures.

We were in Flossenbürg under the most unspeakable conditions, literally. First of all, in the eight, nine days we were there, we saw daily hangings. It was-- they put us in there in such a way that we should see it-- of people falling on the-- you know, [INAUDIBLE].

We had no toilet facilities. There was a tremendous barrel. If you sat on it, you fell in, and you could drown. So there was only another way that we could help ourselves. No food, no water, nothing. Just nothing. We laid there like-- I can't even tell you. You know what I thought of myself? Like I watched Biafra in Africa, these children with the flies in their mouths and the lice. This is what we looked like. Whenever I look at it, I see myself right there among them.

And on the eighth day, the ninth day, again, they told us to get together. We didn't have our clothes anymore. They gave us clothes from the dead bodies-- you know, people who were already slaughtered there. Odd sizes with big letters [NON-ENGLISH] so that we know who we are. Shoes, size 20 from men's shoes, you know.

And they ordered us to march down to the railroad station where, again, this cattle wagon is waiting. Only, we were the cattle. We had no idea that this is going to be our fate. We walked into these cattle wagons. We walked in. They threw

us in, like, you know. And the doors were shut.

I-- we-- I felt a little vibration, so I knew that the train had started moving, because it was-- and we were two hu-- we were maybe 300 kids. So there were these-- there were-- I don't know, there were maybe-- we were pushed into one cattle wagon, all of us in a pile. And, of course, for eight days, locked.

When I tell you this, Phyllis and Dr.--

Weinstein.

--Weinstein that we were totally without any food, any water, any air, no toilet facilities. Like cattle, but the only exception-- for the cattle, they would have opened up a little window for air. For us, they did not do that. So during our ride-- during our eight day ride, whatever it took, they opened up the doors maybe twice or three times with their guns on us, like we would attack them. We were there were kids who were already dead.

And they would say, [NON-ENGLISH] And we would say yes. So we had the task of throwing out the dead bodies onto the tracks. This one Nazi, he was a sadist. He must have been a very, very, very, very bad. He took a canteen of water and spilled it out on the ground in front of us when we begged for a drop. And then he started to laugh. His sadistic laughter that I'm so-- I was so used to hearing, you know.

Anyway, the doors were closed. We continued on. Our-- we arrived in [INAUDIBLE] Hanover, which was very close to Bergen-Belsen. They opened up the doors of the train. And carts were waiting for us. But they were human horses, skeletons [INAUDIBLE] with their things. They were going to take us to hospitals, so we were told that whoever-- and many of us couldn't walk anymore. We were stricken with typhus from the filth and the dysentery and whatever. Our bodies were already covered with those body lice from the filth. They were so embedded that they left holes when they came off.

And many of them had no choice, but they were thrown on those carts. They said hospitals, but I knew that hospital was synonymous with death. These kids were burned to death and they were in the fires. I had a premonition of approaching death. I did. And I said to myself, Mila, pull yourself together and walk the best that you can. And I did.

I only hoped and prayed to God that they do not see the wobbling of my feet under me. I made it to the barrack. When I lay down against the wall, I felt already burning up with fever. I knew that I was deathly ill. But the floors were full of dead bodies. And if I laid down there, and they come in to check, and if I don't move, they will take me, too, to be burned.

So they gave us another task. We had to pull the dead bodies to the burning fires. Imagine me schlepping dead people by their hands onto the burning bodies, where there was piles of woods, gasoline, bodies, wood, gasoline, bodies. Sometimes I thought that the fires will burn part of the sky, and maybe God will feel it, so that he should do something about it. But no such miracles happened. It just didn't.

And I went back to the barracks, and I just laid there. But I had a friend who is now in Australia. Her name is Salish Rosenbaum. And she came over to me, and she said, Mila, get up. You can go to the kitchen and perhaps wash the pots. You can have a little extra food. I said, Salish I said--

Five minutes, go ahead.

Salish I am finished. I can't, sweetheart. So she went and she brought me every day for the three weeks that we were there hot black coffee. My stomach would not take any food at all. I was completely-- I was emaciated. But the hot coffee that I poured into me, I felt I am burning up my fever.

And when the British came in on March 15, 1945, they again wanted to take us to the hospital with the stretchers. And I said no hospital, as best I could, and I didn't want to go on that. I said to him, [NON-ENGLISH] I spoke in German to bring the disinfectant.

They did. They came in with these things, and they sprayed us, and the lice started falling off our bodies. I felt like I had 50 pounds extra on me. When they weighed me, I weighed 50 pounds. When the British came in, I was a living dead. And I'll say this, that if they had not come in when they did, I would not be here to talk about it.

What was their reaction when they saw you?

The British?

Yeah.

They were soldiers. They liberated the camp. One of them said to me in Bergen, Hitler should have taken all of us. He would have had less trouble. This is also something to remember.

Mila, we're going to pause at this point. This is a good point to stop for a few minutes, and then we'll continue with the liberation.

OK.

Thank you.